



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://feedthefuture.gov/article/natural-resource-management-helps-honduran-farmers-combat-coffee-rust>

Natural Resource Management Helps Honduran Farmers Combat Coffee Rust



USDA

Orbelina Vasquez employs community members on her coffee farm. USDA has helped her restore poorly producing coffee trees, improved their productivity and raised the sales price she receives by 150 percent.

Since 2012, coffee leaf rust – a plant disease that destroys coffee plants and drastically reduces crop yields – has spread throughout Central America and the Caribbean, with [devastating consequences](#) for smallholder farmers. According to [Famine Early Warning System](#) reports, coffee production in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua declined by 16-32 percent for the 2013-2014 season compared to 2011-2012. For smallholder farming households in Honduras that are highly dependent on coffee production, a significant decline in coffee yields and quality means lost income and higher food insecurity and economic vulnerability.

Since the early days of the coffee rust outbreak, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been part of the U.S. Government's response to the crisis. In Honduras, a \$20.4 million grant from Food for Progress – which contributes to Feed the Future's goal of inclusive growth through improved agricultural productivity and expanded agricultural trade – has built on earlier programs to improve the competitiveness of the Honduran coffee and bean value chains, while providing agronomic and technical assistance in crop and soil management to smallholder farmers. These skills in natural resource management are essential as farmers combat the effects of coffee rust.

In concert with the Government of Honduras and the Honduran Coffee Institute, USDA's technical agronomic training is helping to reinvigorate one of the most important productive assets coffee farmers have: trees. New pruning techniques are helping farmers stimulate new growth and achieve higher yields.

USDA helps smallholder farmers access finance and credit and builds their links to markets by helping farming cooperatives sell directly to exporters for the first time. Last year, over 1,000 farmers from 39 cooperatives obtained on average \$67 more per 100-pound bag of coffee by selling directly to exporters, with USDA assistance. For a typical farmer participating in the project, this translated into an additional \$800-1,600 in sales. During the 2014-2015 harvest, USDA facilitated contracts between exporters and 206 cooperatives, representing 6,500 smallholder farmers.

Orbelina Vásquez, a farmer who has received USDA assistance, talks proudly about her 3.5-acre coffee farm in Santa Rosita, Siguatepeque. After years of poor agronomic management, Vasquez nurtured her coffee trees back to health with technical support from Food for Progress, including soil analysis, tree pruning training and fertilizer application management. Her fertilizer application is now more targeted and fine-tuned to the needs of the soil, which means she has been able to produce more coffee while using less fertilizer. Vasquez's tree productivity has doubled and she has seen a 150 percent increase in

the price at which she can sell her coffee.

In Honduras, USDA's Food for Progress program aims to improve the output and incomes of over 23,000 agricultural producers and 140 cooperatives, particularly small-scale producers.